

Tree Clearance in Roadways

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“Tree clearance for overhead lines” is, I believe, a more accurate explanation of what we really mean than simply “tree trimming”, a phrase most of us have habitually used. What we are talking about I consider to include the management of overhead line design, construction, and maintenance, as well as all the different phases of direct tree work to the one end that the best interests of *both* trees and wires are permanently served. This may mean changes to some lines; it may mean the removal of some trees; it may mean the trimming of some other trees.

The things I am going to say do not represent officially any company or any organization. They are simply things that seem to me personally to be right or logical. If you differ with me, I hope you will say so in our discussion period afterward.

Line clearance is no more or no less important than the distribution of electric power to the people who need it. Unchecked and untrained tree growth in the vicinity of wires can cause serious interruptions to service, to say nothing of annoying radio interference. To operate properly, all these wire conductors must be carefully separated from anything that will allow a flow of current to the ground. A live tree is a comparatively good conductor because of its moisture content. That is why it is so important that no part of a tree ever be allowed to come into contact with any highly energized wire. Another phase of the tree problem is mechanical interference, such as a limb's rubbing against a wire or blowing or falling against it with enough force to break the wire. If trees are kept properly trimmed these injurious contacts, both potential and actual, with wire conductors may be avoided.

COMBINED SERVICE TO GENERAL PUBLIC

In order to provide electrical, telephone, or telegraph service at reasonable costs, it is often necessary to build overhead lines in rural highway rights-of-way or in streets or alleys in cities and towns. In

order to beautify the highways and adjoining property, it is also desirable that these highways and adjoining property be planted with trees and shrubs. All of us are coming to have more interest in that. I do not believe there is necessarily any fundamental clash of interests in good maintenance of *both* lines and trees. The representatives of the Landscape Department of the Highway Commission are of course primarily concerned with maintaining and creating beauty along the highways by means of trees, grass, and other things. Their interest in power lines intuitively comes second, and understandably so. The reverse is probably true of the utility representative. Each should have a sympathetic view of the problems of the other and a full appreciation of the valuable service each is rendering to the public in his own way. If any difference should arise between these two groups, the difference should always be settled on the basis of what is best for the majority of the people. Government employees, in a sense, are working directly for the voters and taxpayers. Utility employees in the same way are working for rate payers, for people who pay for the utility services. Since today everyone is a user or is benefited by utility services, our boss is one and the same, that is, the general public. If anyone of us fails to serve our boss, the general public, to its best interests, we eventually are going to get into trouble. Whatever is best for all the people all of the time is what all of us must do. We should never lose sight of that as a perpetual guide to our thinking and practices.

An example of our practical problem might be that a tree or group of trees on the highway right-of-way will interfere with a proposed utility line. It is not feasible to build over the trees because they are too tall, so an additional section of line is required to be built around them. This problem would simply resolve itself into weighing the additional cost of the "run around" against the common sense value of the tree or trees, bearing in mind that it is the same public's pocketbook that is affected either way. If it is decided to spend the money for extra line construction costs, then it is the public who pays for them. If it is decided to remove the trees, it is the same public (taxpayers *and* rate payers) who lose their shade and beauty. I could cite innumerable examples, of course. In some cases, a mere expenditure of additional money is not a possible alternative: if that certain tree or trees remain undisturbed, it simply means the new line cannot exist in that roadway. In other cases it might mean that, regardless of money spent, the line would not be as safe or as strong. The answer to each specific problem should always be on the basis of what serves the most important interests of the greater number of people.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

It is my understanding that highway rights-of-way are dedicated to public use for two principal purposes, travel lanes and accommodation of utility lines, as well as any other odd and miscellaneous purposes that might be considered good for the public welfare by constituted government authorities. Most of our difficulty about trees in the future could be eliminated by careful and intelligent planning when each new highway is planned, laid out, and developed. This would mean that at the very beginning a definite space in the right-of-way would be allocated for pavement or travel lanes, a definite space for each expected utility (in most all cases the telephone and power lines, and in some cases telegraph lines in addition), and then some other definite space for trees, all of it to be so planned that one would not interfere with the other. It would be quite practical, of course, to plant in the utility area shrubs or other things which would never grow high enough to interfere with the lowest-hanging lines. But even if such future planning is done to perfection, we still have with us our problems on the old, not so carefully planned roads, for at least a generation to come.

Let us hope that the future can be dismissed with a few words on the supposition that new rights-of-way will be so well and completely planned that those who follow us will not be plagued as we now are with conflicts in the several legitimate uses of the government-controlled areas we call "roads". But how to cope with the conditions in the roads we have *now* cannot be dismissed so simply.

First, all of us concerned must understand and be impressed by the new value the public puts on trees and other beautifying objects on our roads. In this new country of ours, it has been only a few short years since all but fruit trees were something to be cut down, either for the wood or as a nuisance to be eliminated. Our new civilization has brought a new value to trees as things of beauty, and this value in the public mind is going to continue to increase. If any of us have not yet cut our cloth to fit that pattern, we had better start right now. I doubt if any of us long in the business have not been guilty of treating trees at some time or another in a manner of which we would now be thoroughly ashamed. It behooves all of us to recognize this change in the times and to behave accordingly.

NEED OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

Another practical phase is the control as exercised by landscape supervisors. Obviously it is not possible for a supervisor to see every tree

cut, neither should it be necessary. First, the superintendent or foreman, or whoever is in charge of the trimming, should have a general but clear understanding about what should be done to a tree under different circumstances. If the specific circumstances are well covered by what was approved in the general agreement, then the trimming or cutting can proceed with full assurance that it will meet the approval of the highway supervisor. If there is some doubt or any reason to suspect that the highway supervisor may not agree, then there is a clear obligation to confer with him before action, even though a permit has been issued. In other words, if the agent of the highway commission and the man in charge of the tree work understand each other, and then if the man in charge of the tree work faithfully follows along the lines agreed upon, everything will run smoothly. If he fails to do this, everything will not run smoothly. In other words, those who are managing the tree work must gain the trust and confidence of those responsible for roadside improvement, and then must continue to behave in a way to deserve that confidence and trust. If that can be universally accomplished and maintained, then I can see a very happy and continued development of our Indiana roadside beautification program with an unhampered travel of utility services along those same roadways.